

It seems to me that the irrigation industry so focused on the latest technological advances and a marketing race has forgotten to make simple irrigation work for the average end users. I've watched superintendents embrace promised modern marvels, only to wonder how their hopes for so much had delivered so little.

Now I have a vision, born from the frustrations of turfgrass managers who have gone to the well and put their livelihoods on the line for something better, only to realize that the buckets they winched from the depths are empty. I have a wish list for an Irrigation Reformation, and I am not alone.

In the past, we have seen modernization of many aspects of turfgrass management. Irrigation companies, in particular, always seem to focus on what technology can deliver. But in the field, where the roller meets the turf, there is one segment of the industry that needs to go back to the drawing board: irrigation companies.

My wish list for reform is simple:

I wish for a sprinkler head that is efficient, adjustable, maintainable and durable. Today's irrigation head, no matter what the engineers are saying, is a design disaster containing planned obsolescence sure to create a maintenance wound bound to fester.

I wish for more sprinkler heads to be as creative as the terrain that they irrigate. No longer should we hear from designers, installers or manufacturers that smaller heads are "just too difficult."

I wish for irrigation design that actually works with golf course topography and is not simply superimposed over a plan-view routing. How many times do we have to watch the sprinkler on the high ground create a drainage problem in the low ground before we give ourselves permission to use water more effectively?

I wish for irrigation installers who truly know *and care* about what a difference it makes to superintendents (and the game) when they actually put heads in the right places and with the right spacing in their manic rush to complete their jobs. If you don't believe there's a problem, ask any superintendent who has measured off 80 feet in a 65-foot spacing pattern or added a head that should have been installed originally.

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I Have a Dream: Irrigation Reform

BY DAVE WILBER



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intendents water as they know they should, rather than requiring them to spend dozens of hours being trained to water as the system is designed to let them.

I wish that the same control can be updated, without having to scrap the old control system and that new updates are real advancements rather than beta-tests.

I wish for sensing devices, weather data collectors, measurement units and other peripherals that could stand on their own. Smarter data collection is wonderful. Making it do less than it should to suit the needs of a weak central-control database is absurd.

I wish designers would consider individual soil types and the laws of water-movement physics when they work up a system and size the pipe.

I wish evapotranspiration data would become an interesting benchmark and not a controlling factor, and that the research community would seek a deeper understanding of turfgrass water requirements.

This is a call — no, it's a plea — to the irrigation industry to get itself out into the field with some superintendents and polish its act. If you *really* listen to your customers, especially when they are frustrated or when things aren't working right, you might hear some of my wishes loud and clear.

Like that first great reformer, Martin Luther, superintendents should nail their complaints to the doors of irrigation suppliers, designers and installers. Along with that, they should take a serious look at their own irrigation management and hold themselves as accountable as they should be holding the industry.

It's a dream I share with many others.

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